Chapter One
Introduction

Stephen Charles Neill (1900-84) was one of the most important figures on the world Christian scene during the twentieth century. Neill's stellar student career and his turbulent tenure as an Anglican missionary in South India provide a touchstone for investigating his times. Neill's was a remarkable life, useful for exploring the larger contexts of which he was a part. As historian Robert Eric Frykenberg has written:

> Here and there, and every once in a while, some story about an individual emerges and we learn about actions, circumstances, and events that are more than ordinary. Placed in a position of special worth or advantage, with special recognition or significance, the story of the life of such a personality serves to illuminate many things around it, both near and far.[1]

Neill's life was indeed one of those life-stories that was 'more than ordinary'. Stephen Neill's life was a tumultuous one, beginning with his missionary service to India, from 1924 to 1945. During this period Gandhi's nationalist movement was challenging fiercely the massive British colonial enterprise, raising serious quandaries for Indians, for example, why they should fight for the independence of others while still under foreign rule. Traditional

1. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 72.

Indian ways of life were being subverted economically, governmentally, culturally and religiously. This was all reaching a head during Neill's tenure as a missionary in South India. In 1947, only two years after Neill's departure, India gained its independence. Neill was caught up in all of this and in many ways was a casualty of these tensions.

Stephen Neill was loved by most of the Indian Christians he served. Christianity and British imperialism meant emancipation for many of them, especially Dalits. Lower-caste people received education and benefits unimaginable under Brahmin rule. However, Neill was still a part of this massive imperial machine that was clearly in decline. Both Indians and Britons knew that collapse and withdrawal were inevitable; it was only a question of when.[2] Neill's bishopric in India, 1939-45, was right in the middle of this maelstrom, and he knew it. Later in life, he reflected:

> During these days, stirring events were taking place in India, and it was impossible to remain unaffected by the rising tide of nationalism. . . . This was an unpleasant time at which to be at work in India; and, the deeper one's affection for the Indian people, the more unpleasant it was certain to become.[3]

The maelstrom was not just about Indian politics; there was tremendous conflict going on in Neill's various personal and professional associations as well and many of the problems that surfaced during his India years would remain with him to the end.

Neill was an extremely competent, even brilliant, man but he was also a man of fragile health – both physical and psychological. He was able to hide it fairly well, and for long periods. Eventually, however, it would surface and occasionally his fragile health led to breakdowns. For example, Neill dealt with two severe crises during his time in South India which led him into serious conflict with people within his circle. During both of them he questioned whether he could go on as a missionary. In the first case he persevered; the second one nearly killed him, however. He did manage to make it through with therapy but it completely derailed his career.

While Stephen Neill's intellectual gifts were obvious to all, he was also a classic case of what Peter Berger has called a 'homeless mind'.[4] Intense

2. Neill lamented the fact that 'the independence of India was to be achieved by revolution and not by gradual progress'. See Stephen Neill, *God's Apprentice: The Autobiography of Bishop Stephen Neill*, ed. by Eleanor Jackson, with a Foreword by C.F.D. Moule (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. 128.
3. Ibid., pp. 128, 131.
4. See Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973). This is

struggles punctuated his life. His conflicts were not always with other people; they were often battles with his own inner demons. Neill was never satisfied; he was constantly trying to improve himself and fix the people around him. He was a perfectionist. When in power, he could be dictatorial and exacting. He carried himself with an air of authority that propelled him into positions of leadership but throughout his life a dark side was never far away.

Those who knew Neill tended to recognise his issues. Christopher Lamb wrote:

> [There was] perhaps a sense that he had never fulfilled the superlative promise of his youth. The reasons for that are not yet fully clear, though his autobiography speaks of internal struggles commensurate with the powers of mind that everyone recognized in him.[5]

Lamb speculates on the origin of these struggles:

> [As a boy] He . . . experienced the temptation to contract out of society in a world of books and imagination. . . . The precocious teenager, teaching himself Hebrew by torchlight under the bedclothes, found it difficult to share what he was learning with his contemporaries, and may have taken early refuge in a kind of lonely stoicism. Religion, as well as nature and circumstance, may have conspired to mold him this way. . . . Perhaps a less austere religion would have given the church a servant less deeply damaged.[6]

Signs of greatness were never distant, however. For example, 'Neill's academic career was spectacularly untroubled.'[7]

Richard Pierard once commented upon Neill's teen years:

> As a teenager he began to display the psychological symptoms that would plague him throughout his life – insomnia, deep depression, and outbursts of temper. . . . [Some] have suggested he suffered

touched on later in the final chapter of the present work.

5. Christopher Lamb, 'Stephen Neill 1900-1984, Unafraid to Ask Ultimate Questions', in *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*, ed. by Gerald Anderson, Robert Coote, Norman Horner and James Phillips (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 445.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 446.

> from repressed sexuality (one even said homosexuality), since he never married and had a negative attitude toward women involved professionally in Christian work.[8]

However, Pierard, too, recognised the powerful gifts within:

> Neill distinguished himself as an Anglican churchman, biblical scholar, missionary theorist, ecumenical leader, and historian. . . . He possessed competence in biblical and classical languages as well as several modern European and Indian languages, and was the author, co-author, or editor of at least sixty-five books, as well as innumerable essays, reviews, addresses, and sermons.[9]

Eleanor Jackson knew Neill and edited his autobiography seven years after his death. She, too, noticed a certain dissonance:

> It is now possible to see more clearly which parts of Neill's legacy will have abiding value, while the issues involved in Neill's work, and his heroic struggle with his personal problems, remain highly relevant today. If one may sum up his life in a single verse of Scripture, the most appropriate text would seem to be, 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us' (2 Cor. 4:7).[10]

Renowned New Testament scholar, C.F.D. Moule, a contemporary of Neill, wrote the Foreword to Neill's published autobiography. In a passage of sympathetic candor, Moule contrasted Neill's many strengths with his crippling weaknesses:

> A born linguist with a fastidious 'feel' for words, blessed with a tenacious memory full of anecdotes and circumstantial detail, he could lay a spell on any audience. [His] is . . . a story of contrasts. There is the pathos of frustrated ambition, the dogging of ill-health, insomnia, psychological imbalance and bouts of depression; but also a childlike enjoyment of praise . . . and the elation of wielding

8. Richard Pierard, 'Stephen Neill', in *Historians of the Christian Tradition: Their Methodology and Influence on Western Thought*, ed. by Michael Bauman and Martin Klauber, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Holman, 1995), p. 532.
9. Ibid., p. 531.
10. Eleanor Jackson, 'The Continuing Legacy of Stephen Neill', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1995), p. 77.

> a formidable intellect and the polyglot gift to hold huge audiences spellbound with lucid expositions in their own languages. . . . There is a fresh and ever-curious mind, but also a reactionary streak. . . . An ingratiating charm lives next door to an Irish temper, controlled with difficulty; the apostolic asceticism is no stranger to a relish for good cuisine. Vanity threatens to spoil one who is conscious of exceptional talents . . . [but] Stephen Neill's constant desire was to place his remarkable abilities at the disposal of God. . . . India was his first and last love. The premature termination of his ministry there (whatever its real cause or circumstances) was traumatic. Everything else that he did was pushed at him by circumstances – the toilsome years of ecumenical organizing and drafting, the Chairs at Hamburg and Nairobi; even the very active last years in Oxford. . . . Readers [of Neill's autobiography] . . . will want to give thanks . . . for the extraordinary achievements of this much-tempted, brilliant, enigmatic man.[11]

Owen Chadwick and Kenneth Cragg, two well-known historians and also contemporaries of Neill, wrote an article on him shortly after his death, pointing out his contrasting forces within:

> Neill was the most powerful intellectual force which the Church of India had seen since W.H. Mill in the earlier nineteenth century. . . . To friends he always gave the impression of a man without strain or worry who could work longer hours than most. . . . Behind the scenes [however] his health was still troublesome. . . . Perhaps he had a little sense of frustration.[12]

Neill's internal struggles, frequent illnesses, and occasional unbalance were somewhat well-known. In his obituary in *The Times*, it was written:

> His death removes one of the most striking and gifted figures from the world church scene, the variety of whose gifts at one time seemed certain to ensure him one of the highest offices in the church. . . . [However] Many will regret that Neill's breakdowns precluded the offices of leadership for which he was otherwise so well fitted.[13]

11. Moule, 'Foreword', in Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 7-8.
12. Kenneth Cragg and Owen Chadwick, 'Stephen Charles Neill, 1900-1984', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 71 (1985), pp. 606-8.
13. *The Times*, 24 July 1984.

Neill's breakdown in 1944, and the ensuing events which led to the termination of his office as bishop, were the reasons his career would take a sudden turn. He never would hold a high office in the Church again. While he never fully recovered from that devastation, he did move on to become one of the most important figures of twentieth-century Christianity. His international fame came from his many books, his lectures on nearly every continent and an enormous breadth of scholarship that wowed audiences everywhere he went. He served the global church in many capacities, leaving a mark nearly everywhere he went.

After a stellar academic career in England, Neill surprised those around him by becoming a missionary to South India. He spent two decades there (1924-45), eventually becoming bishop of the Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) diocese in 1939.[14] It was not his tenure in South India that made him a Christian celebrity; rather, it was his writings. C.F.D. Moule called him an 'indefatigable reader and writer', noting in particular, 'the astonishing number and the consistently high quality of books Stephen Neill wrote'.[15]

Although Neill died in 1984, many of his 65 books are still read and cited.[16] Some of the books he either wrote or edited are classics.[17] His *History of the Ecumenical Movement* is a standard reference work to this day. He was an expert in the history of New Testament criticism. His treatment

14. Tinnevelly is the name the British gave to the region; today the diocese is known in its Tamil form 'Tirunelveli'.
15. Moule, 'Foreword', in Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 7-8.
16. *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984) was republished in 2004; with John Goodwin and Arthur Dowle, *Concise Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966) was republished in 2004; *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985) was republished in 2002; *Jesus Through Many Eyes: Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976) was republished in 2002 (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.); *Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Christian Dialogue with Other Religions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) was republished in 1999.
17. *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth,: Penguin Books, 1964) has gone through several editions, most recently in revised form under the editorship of Owen Chadwick (London: Penguin, 1986). This book made *Christian History*'s '100 Great Books for Christian History Buffs' (Fall 2001). *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) was republished and brought up to 1986 (second edition) by N.T. Wright (*The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* [Oxford: University Press, 1988]). *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Neill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954) is the standard reference work on the ecumenical movement's history. The substantial *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*, edited by Neill, Gerald Anderson and John Goodwin (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971) is still an important reference work in Christian mission studies.

of Anglicanism is still one of the best.[18] Perhaps his greatest contributions were in the area of Christian missions. His *History of Christian Missions* is still used in university and seminary courses. His investigation of the relationship between colonialism and Christian missions gained him admittance to the British Academy.[19] Missions historian Timothy Yates wrote that Neill's books on the Apostle's Creed, entitled *Beliefs* (1939) and *Foundation Beliefs* (1941), 'deserve to be reprinted'.[20] Indeed, it was his seemingly ubiquitous publications which prompted Yates to write, 'Stephen Neill must be regarded as one of the intellectual giants of his generation.'[21]

Neill was a ubiquitous presence on the world church scene over several decades. His prominence can be accredited to several factors. First, at 83 years his life was a long and productive one. His career intersected with the important discussions and debates that occurred throughout the twentieth-century Church.

Second, he often found himself in the middle of important developments in church history. He lived in six different countries throughout his life: the United Kingdom, India, Switzerland, Germany, Kenya and the United States.[22] He was in India during the decline of colonialism and played a role in the establishment of the Church of South India.[23] He was in Geneva when the World Council of Churches was born in 1948. He was a professor in West Germany during the 1960s, right smack in the middle of the Cold War. He was a professor at the University of Nairobi during the early 1970s, when African colonial resentment was erupting.

A third reason for Neill's prominence was that he was able to communicate with a broad cross-section of people and cultures because of

18. Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958). This book was still being published into the 1980s and later citations in this present volume are from the 4th edn, published in 1982 by Oxford University Press.
19. This is according to Cragg and Chadwick in 'Stephen Charles Neill: 1900-1984', pp. 602-14. Neill's book *A History of Christian Missions* launched his study of this topic. Following that book (first published in 1964), Neill authored a volume that deals more specifically with these ideas called *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966). In 1970 he published *Call to Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press), a work that proposes five crucial issues surrounding missions and imperialism.
20. Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), p. 144.
21. Ibid., p. 143.
22. Neill spent significant time in Connecticut, New Jersey, and North Carolina. While he never held a long-term position in the US, he often visited for extended periods, particularly for research.
23. Neill left India just before the Church of South India (CSI) was formed in 1947.

his facility in languages; he could read or speak around fifteen of them.[24] This afforded him the rare opportunity to communicate with prominent members of the Christian world scene in their native language.

A fourth reason for Neill's wide popularity was his strategic goal of writing for laypeople as well as for scholars. Many of his books were directed at the laity, and they returned the favour by reading his writings and inviting him to lecture, affording him the privilege of travelling all over the world as an invited guest of numerous ecclesial and educational establishments.

Overview of Neill's Life and Career

Stephen Neill was born in Edinburgh on 31 December 1900, the last day of the nineteenth century. During his early childhood, his parents were missionary doctors in India. In 1912 Neill began studies at Dean Close School, an evangelical boarding school in Cheltenham, where he studied until 1919, excelling in classical languages. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1919 to 1924. Neill was a brilliant student in classics, theology and New Testament studies.

In 1924 Neill entered the South Indian mission field. He joined with his parents and a sister to help the Dohnavur mission, famously associated with Amy Carmichael. In 1927 he moved back to England for a short time but returned to India in 1928 as a missionary for the Church Missionary Society (CMS).[25] He served the Tinnevelly (now Tirunelveli) and Travancore dioceses in various ways until 1930 when he became Warden of Tirumaiur, a theological college in the Tinnevelly diocese. He became bishop of that diocese in 1939. When he suffered a breakdown in 1944, his bishopric abruptly ended, as did his residence in India.

Between 1946 and 1961 Neill was an active contributor to the worldwide ecumenical movement – a grand initiative of the mainline Protestant churches and many of the Eastern Orthodox churches to foster Christian unity. He served in the role of Assistant Bishop to the Archbishop of Canterbury and served as a liaison between the Archbishop and the World Council of Churches in Geneva from 1947 to 1950. He was there when the World Council of Churches became a reality. That institution

24. Neill spoke English, German, French, Spanish, Tamil and Malayalam. He studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Icelandic, Portuguese, Sanskrit, Urdu, Italian and Swahili. Neill was aware of this gift. In his autobiography, he wrote 'My one gift is that I understand words. . . . From the age of five I read voraciously.' See Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 34-35.

25. The Church Missionary Society changed its name in 1995 to the Church Mission Society.

has accomplished immeasurable good on behalf of Christianity worldwide. Once again, due to poor health and interpersonal conflicts, Neill abruptly resigned in 1950, although he remained a resident of Geneva.

During the years 1950 to 1962 Neill started a new publishing venture called World Christian Books. He was perfect for this job because he was so adept at writing and in foreign languages. He was able to recruit authors from all over the world in order to publish books for the global church. Neill was a key person in bringing together the Western churches with the churches in the Global South. At that time, the Global South churches were often called the 'younger churches'. This time proved very productive for Neill and he published dozens of 'simple' books in 35 different languages. He also edited a couple of major dictionaries that would greatly assist the emerging, global, Christian consciousness. In 1954, with Ruth Rouse, he edited the landmark book, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*. His literary output during this period was impressive.

In 1962 Neill moved to Germany and served as the Chair of Missions at the University of Hamburg, a post he held until 1967. He produced an important trilogy of books that investigated European colonialism's impact on the Church, and vice versa. The writings he produced during the 1960s were major contributions to the scholarly community and won him election to the British Academy in 1969.[26] Some of the books Neill produced in the 1960s enjoyed great success and had far-reaching impact, such as *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (1961) and *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (1964). He frequently preached at St Thomas a' Becket Anglican Church in Hamburg during this period, and seemed to achieve a level of mental stability that allowed his prodigious academic gifts to flourish.

In 1969 Neill moved to East Africa and founded a Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi. He taught philosophy, religious education, Old Testament, Koine Greek, Religion in the modern world, Hinduism and several other subjects. He had to contend with the anti-colonial movement that was in full steam at the time and wrote of this period, 'The minds of all our students had been deeply influenced and thoroughly conditioned by the anti-missionary myth.'[27] Not only did he contend with a lack of sympathy and a lack of resources, he also dealt with a lack of personnel. Nevertheless, Neill's years in Nairobi were not in vain, as the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies exists to the present day and is one of the leading centres in Africa of the study of religion. Some of Neill's mentees during

26. Cragg and Chadwick, 'Stephen Charles Neill: 1900-1984', p. 610.
27. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 304.

that time, such as Jesse Mugambi, went on to become internationally known in their discipline. In 1973 Neill made one final move: back home to the United Kingdom.

The last decade of Neill's life was spent at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, where he served as an assistant bishop and held the academic title of 'Senior Scholar'. He kept a busy schedule of travelling and lecturing. During this period he began writing his magnum opus, a three-volume history of Christianity in India. He died in 1984, having just published the first volume and completed the research for the second. It was organised by Alister McGrath of Oxford and published a year later.[28] Alas, his untimely death robbed us of what would have been an extremely helpful third volume.

Neill was a constant presence on the world church scene in the twentieth century. It was never his intention to be a wandering missionary statesman, ecumenist or religious studies professor. Neill believed his calling was to be a missionary and he was hurt deeply when that door shut. He never fully recovered from the trauma of losing his bishopric in India in 1944-45 but, through faith and sheer determination, he bounced back and made substantial contributions to the faith that had sustained him throughout.

A Word on Sources

Written near the end of his life, the most significant published primary source on Neill's life is his autobiography, *God's Apprentice*, published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1991. His autobiography provides a valuable glimpse into how he perceived his life story. Nevertheless, this source is not without problems for the researcher. Neill, the expert historian, was unable to be candid about certain chapters of his life. Undoubtedly, some would agree with Jocelyn Murray that Neill's autobiography 'conceals more than it tells us about the author'.[29] Similarly, Bishop Richard Holloway argues that, while revealing in some places, the autobiography 'hides more than it discloses'.[30]

For example, in his autobiography Neill never mentions the name of Amy Carmichael who was in charge of his first mission when he arrived in India for the first time in 1924 and with whom he fell into conflict. He neglects to acknowledge the death of his sister Marjorie Penelope in 1929. They were both in India at the time and this loss, no doubt, would have

28. *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* and *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858*.
29. Jocelyn Murray, 'Book Review: *God's Apprentice: The Autobiography of Bishop Stephen Neill*', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 17, no. 3 (July 1993), p. 142.
30. Richard Holloway, 'The Mystery in Stephen Neill', *Church Times*, no. 6717 (8 November 1991), p. 13.

affected Neill. Neill provides a lopsided account of the way in which he lost his bishopric. To the end of his life, he never acknowledged the core reason why in 1944 he came under fire from Indian villagers and church authorities. He minimises conflicts with others and typically takes the safer route: a breakdown in his health. Certainly, his health was precarious but his mental challenges often led him to snap and lash out at others, further isolating someone who struggled for deep and lasting friendships. This happened repeatedly in his career. Neill never married, so his friends, students and co-workers were particularly important to him. However, with enough lapses in his behaviour, Neill could become insufferable to those around him, forcing him to move to another country and start all over again. Why did Neill, in the words of one, 'airbrush' his own memoirs, knowing the disservice that was being done to history?[31] Was he even aware of what he was doing? Were there things he wanted to hide? We gain a small glimpse into Neill's methodology near the end of his autobiography, a glimpse that sheds some light on these questions:

> I have come to the conclusion that I have the wrong kind of memory. I remember and feel as vividly and acutely as though they were happening today all the fears and anxieties, the frustrations and failures, the absurdities and contradictions, the feelings of exasperation and near despair. I do not forget the occasional successes and achievements, the moments of happiness in which it has seemed as though something really had got done that was worthwhile; but these things come to me with far less immediacy and vividness than the others. As a result I tend to take a rather dark view of the past, to question what appears to be achievement, and to wonder whether anything has been done that will stand the test of time or even the censure of my own conscience.[32]

Neill began his writing his autobiography on 31 December 1970.[33] The latest date mentioned in that work is 1980.[34] He died rather suddenly in 1984.

Neill began to ponder writing an autobiography during a visit to India in 1970. He had been invited to preach the Christmas Day service at All Saints Church in Coonoor – in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu.[35] One can

31. Letter from Eleanor Jackson to the author dated 28 November 2002.
32. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 317.
33. Ibid., p. 27.
34. Ibid., p. 331.
35. Neill had several connections in the area. He had spent time there during his

only speculate that it was the nostalgia of being in South India, preaching in Tamil, visiting the graves of his parents, and spending time with his sister that prompted him to consider writing his life story.

Neill's autobiography was published in 1991 under the editorship of Eleanor Jackson. According to Jackson, less than half of the complete manuscript was actually published; it was pared down to meet the publishers' length requirement.[36] The published autobiography is at times difficult to read, due to its patchy coverage of some events. One reviewer writes:

> Although the editor has done her best to present the text in a faithful and orderly fashion, it still reads like the transcript of an oral history full of gaps and digressions, weak on dates, sometimes pompous and self-serving, often harsh in its judgment of others, clearly not the book Neill would have published if he had lived to revise it and edit it himself.[37]

As an editor, Neill realised his autobiographical ruminations would have to be given more coherence if a book were to be made. At the end of the published version of his autobiography, he wrote:

> There are a number of books which I still hope to write. If I manage to complete in ten years all that I have in mind to do, I may then perhaps sit down to write my autobiography, and that would be a far more difficult and exacting task than the setting down of these somewhat random recollections of grace abounding to the chief of sinners over a period of rather more than seventy years.[38]

missionary days in order to escape the gruelling summer heat, a habit of many Western missionaries. He had a sister in Coonoor, Isabel, who was a missionary to Muslims. She had lived there since 1928. Isabel Neill contributed an article for a book entitled *Debate on Missions*, ed. by Herbert E. Hoefer (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, 1979). The 'Contributors' section in the book contains the following quotation (p. xviii), 'Miss Neill has been a missionary in India since 1928, especially among the Muslim women. Presently she is running a girls' boarding school in Coonoor.' Neill's parents had gone to live with Isabel in 1947. His father worked as the chaplain of All Saints Church almost until his death in 1948. Neill's mother died there in 1951. Both of them are buried in the churchyard. Neill and Isabel owned property in Coonoor, and Neill visited there about every two years after he left India. See Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 26-27, 330-31.

36. Jackson gave the author extensive correspondence between herself and the editors at Hodder & Stoughton.
37. Charles Henry Long, 'Review of *God's Apprentice*, by Stephen Neill', *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 75, no. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 423-25.
38. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 336.

Nevertheless, the 'random recollections' left behind are invaluable for the study of Stephen Neill.

Neill interpreted his own life in less than critical terms. For example, in his interpretation of his skirmish with Amy Carmichael, the famous missionary to India, he exonerated himself, yet blamed others.[39] In other places he explains away his quick temper: 'I lost my temper in public in one of the committees which followed on the diocesan council. . . . But it is not easy, as tiredness grows, to have everything under control.'[40]

Again, when Neill was clearly in the wrong during the downfall of his bishopric, he was accused by his boss, Foss Westcott, the Metropolitan of India, Burma and Ceylon, of refusing to acknowledge any wrongdoing:

> You must have realized the scandal which your action had caused and serious injury to the Church and her work which they had entailed, but in not one of your letters has there been any acknowledgment of this fact, or expression of sorrow for having been the cause of it.[41]

Neill, however, interpreted the situation differently, choosing to place the blame on a series of events such as exhaustion, an infection in his hand and the loss of his reading glasses, which could not be replaced because of the war.[42]

In reading the autobiography, one gets the impression that Neill was often surrounded with incompetence and he had to come onto the scene and straighten things out. This happens repeatedly.

Neill's autobiography 'reveals a curiously complex personality'.[43] At a few points he speculated candidly on his shortcomings. One writer wrote the following:

> Insofar as an autobiography is intended to reveal the person, Neill comes through as a rather tragic figure, lonely, restless and unfulfilled, suffering from insomnia and frequent bouts of deep depression. There is no doubt of his courage, creativity and unwavering faith.

39. Ibid., p. 93. It must be noted that Neill never did mention Carmichael's name in his autobiography. However, it is clear that he was referring to their intense argument that led to Neill's dismissal from the Dohnavur mission.
40. Ibid., p. 200.
41. Archbishop Westcott to Stephen Neill, 26 June 1945, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College, Kolkata, India.
42. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 197, 200.
43. Anonymous, '"Bishop, Scholar, Missionary", Review of *God's Apprentice*, by Stephen Neill', *Expository Times*, no. 103 (April 1992), p. 224.

> But there is doubt that his long list of accomplishments really reflected the extraordinary promise with which his career began. He seemed always to be getting ready, always the accomplished apprentice, in one field after another, to the end.[44]

What comes through loud and clear in Neill's autobiography is ambivalence. He felt a tremendous need for people, yet was reluctant to reveal too much of himself. He was proud and often boastful, countered by a recourse to self-effacing humility. There are many emotional highs and lows throughout the account, inevitably leading the reader to question the emotional stability of the man. By the end of his life, Neill was keenly aware of his psychological problems, for example, when he wrote: 'My fierce temper, the outward expression of so many inward frustrations.'[45]

In Stephen Neill there are clear signs of brilliance, soaring brilliance, and it is doubtful that Neill stretched the truth in this regard. Neill's contemporaries often described him in the loftiest of terms:

> Apart from William Temple, Stephen Neill may have been the outstanding Anglican of his generation. He was certainly the most versatile: classicist, linguist, historian, missionary statesman, ecumenical pioneer, popular preacher and lecturer, author, innovator in theological education on four continents, teaching in fluent Tamil, German and Swahili as well as English. His intellectual gifts were legendary. His record as a student at Cambridge is said never to have been surpassed.[46]

Yet there are instances in his autobiography where Neill, in almost Pauline fashion, confessed his simple faith:

> I had every reason to believe that Christ had died for my sins; the rest of my life could not be spent in any other way than in grateful and adoring service of the One who had wrought that inestimable benefit. Even now, I see no way of improving on that discovery. . . . Then, as now, the thing that I cared about far more deeply than anything else was that men and women should be brought to know Jesus Christ.[47]

44. Long, 'Review of *God's Apprentice*, by Stephen Neill', pp. 424-25.
45. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 36.
46. Long, 'Review of *God's Apprentice*, by Stephen Neill', pp. 423-24.
47. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 35-36, 72.

Both Neill's published and unpublished autobiographies are used at length in this work. However, his autobiography is only one among many primary sources I have used. Neill's interpretation of his life is only one possible interpretation. The biographer must cross-check and approach all sources with a degree of distrust.

Those who are familiar with the scholarship on Stephen Neill know that I have published numerous writings about him. In fact, my first published book, which stemmed from my PhD dissertation at the University of Calgary in Canada, was entitled *Bishop Stephen Neill: From Edinburgh to South India* and was published by Peter Lang in 2008 as part of its Theology and Religion series. That book dealt with the first half of Neill's life. Since my PhD years (1999-2005), however, I have continued to research Neill's years in Geneva, Hamburg, Nairobi, Oxford and various places in the United States. I still travel regularly to India in search of more Stephen Neill leads. I believe I have visited all of the major archives in the world that have a significant amount of Neill material.

Here I should point out a wonderfully fortuitous event regarding Stephen Neill's autobiography. In 2003 I was invited by Brian Stanley to the Henry Martyn Centre, University of Cambridge, to deliver a lecture on Stephen Neill. It so happened that Bishop N.T. (Tom) Wright was also there giving a lecture. I attended his lecture and introduced myself afterwards, knowing that he and Stephen Neill were acquainted and even published a book together. Tom was happy to hear that someone was finally doing serious work on Neill and he divulged some information that brought me up short. He told me he had a copy of Neill's *unedited* autobiography in manuscript form. This was particularly important for me to hear because I had just visited Eleanor Jackson's home and found that her version of the manuscript was in bad shape and missing large sections.

I finally got around to e-mailing Bishop Wright in 2005 and asked him whether he would lend me the Neill manuscript he had in his possession. About a year later, on 30 July 2006, he wrote back to let me know it was hidden somewhere in his garage and I would be welcome to visit him to try to find it.

On 22 May 2010 he wrote to me again to let me know that he was moving from Durham to St Andrews and would have to go through all of the boxes in his garage; he wanted me to know that he believed the Neill manuscript would probably surface during the move. He wrote to me again on 26 July 2010 to let me know the good news:

> The typescript has at last shown up, as I thought it would once we went through all the boxes in the store room. (I did invite you to perform this task some while ago, I recall!) . . . I will get my

> secretary to photocopy and send it to you. It's quite bulky so it may need two or more parcels. We'll see. Warm greetings and good wishes, Tom Wright.

His secretary e-mailed me on 16 September 2010 to let me know she had shipped it to me and that I should receive it in four to five weeks: 'Better late than never', she wrote. It was a wonderful day when the two parcels arrived in my office at my university in California.

The unedited autobiography is indeed bulky and difficult to work with. However, it is complete – and it has served me well in writing this full biography of Stephen Neill. There are many passages that were edited out of the published version and I am supremely grateful to Tom Wright for sending me this valuable work.

I consulted countless primary sources for this work: the Church Missionary Society archives held at the University of Birmingham, the Dean Close School archives in Cheltenham, the University of Cambridge archives and many collections in India, including those held by Bishop's College in Kolkata, Gurukul Lutheran Theological Seminary in Chennai and the Bishop Stephen Neill Study and Research Centre in Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu. I researched the World Council of Churches (WCC) archives in Geneva, the Divinity Library Special Collections at Yale University and the archives of St Thomas à Becket Anglican Church in Hamburg. I conducted myriad interviews in Africa, the UK, the US, India, Germany, Switzerland and probably a few other countries along the way.

I have been researching Stephen Neill since the year 1999. This book is probably not the last time I will write on him but it is certainly my most important contribution. I am deeply grateful to Adrian Brink at The Lutterworth Press for the opportunity to write it. It is the perfect press to publish the Neill biography, as he published numerous books with the company, including the *Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, *Salvation Tomorrow*, *The Unfinished Task*, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* and the *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*. It is my hope that this biography will be a meaningful addition to Lutterworth's line-up of books by and about Bishop Stephen Neill.